

involves an introduction to healthcare, basic medical terminology, anatomy, and physiology. In the second year, courses are more rigorous and usually include occupational therapist courses in areas such as mental health, gerontology, and pediatrics. Students also must complete supervised fieldwork in a clinic or community setting. Applicants to occupational therapist assistant programs can improve their chances of admission by taking high school courses in biology and health and by performing volunteer work in nursing homes, occupational or physical therapist's offices, or elsewhere in the healthcare field.

Occupational therapist assistants are regulated in most States, and must pass a national certification examination after they graduate. Those who pass the test are awarded the title of certified occupational therapist assistant.

Occupational therapist aides usually receive most of their training on the job. Qualified applicants must have a high school diploma, strong interpersonal skills, and a desire to help people in need. Applicants may increase their chances of getting a job by volunteering their services, thus displaying initiative and aptitude to the employer.

Assistants and aides must be responsible, patient, and willing to take directions and work as part of a team. Furthermore, they should be caring and want to help people who are not able to help themselves.

### Job Outlook

Employment of occupational therapist assistants and aides is expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations through 2010. Federal legislation imposing limits on reimbursement for therapy services may adversely affect the job market for occupational therapist assistants and aides in the near term. However, over the long run, demand for occupational therapist assistants and aides will continue to rise, with growth in the number of individuals with disabilities or limited function. Growth will result from an increasing population in older age groups, including the baby-boom generation, which increasingly needs occupational therapy services as they become older. Demand also will result from advances in medicine that allow more people with critical problems to survive and then need rehabilitative therapy. Third-party payers, concerned with rising health care costs may begin to encourage occupational therapists to delegate more of the hands-on therapy work to occupational therapist assistants and aides. By having assistants and aides work more closely with clients under the guidance of a therapist, the cost of therapy should be more modest than otherwise.

### Earnings

Median annual earnings of occupational therapist assistants were \$34,340 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$29,280 and \$40,690. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$23,970, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$45,370. Median annual earnings of occupational therapist assistants in 2000 were \$33,390 in hospitals.

Median annual earnings of occupational therapist aides were \$20,710 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$16,510 and \$28,470. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$14,370, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$35,900.

### Related Occupations

Occupational therapist assistants and aides work under the direction of occupational therapists. Other occupations in the healthcare field that work under the supervision of professionals include dental assistants, medical assistants, pharmacy technicians, and physical therapist assistants and aides.

### Sources of Additional Information

For information on a career as an occupational therapist assistant and a list of accredited programs, contact:

► The American Occupational Therapy Association, 4720 Montgomery Ln., P.O. Box 31220, Bethesda, MD 20824-1220. Internet: <http://www.aota.org>

## Pharmacy Aides

(O\*NET 31-9095.00)

### Significant Points

- Many pharmacy aides work evenings, weekends, and some holidays.
- Eight out of 10 jobs are in retail pharmacies.
- Job opportunities are expected to be good, especially for those with related work experience.

### Nature of the Work

Pharmacy aides help licensed pharmacists with administrative duties in running a pharmacy. Aides often are clerks or cashiers who primarily answer telephones, handle money, stock shelves, and perform other clerical duties. They work closely with pharmacy technicians. *Pharmacy technicians* usually perform more complex tasks than do assistants, although, in some States, their duties and job titles overlap. (See the statement on pharmacy technicians elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) Aides refer any questions regarding prescriptions, drug information, or health matters to a pharmacist. (See the statement on pharmacists elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Aides have several important duties that help the pharmacy to function smoothly. They may establish and maintain patient profiles, prepare insurance claim forms, and stock and take inventory of prescription and over-the-counter medications. Accurate recordkeeping is necessary to help avert a potentially dangerous drug interaction. Because many people have medical insurance to help pay for the prescription, it is essential that pharmacy aides efficiently and correctly correspond with the third-party insurance providers to obtain payment. They also maintain the inventory and inform the supervisor of stock needs so that the pharmacy has the vital medications for those who need them. Some also clean pharmacy equipment, help with the maintenance of equipment and supplies, and manage the cash register.



*Helping to keep complete and accurate medication records is an important duty of pharmacy aides.*

### Working Conditions

Pharmacy aides work in clean, organized, well-lighted, and well-ventilated areas. Most of their workday is spent on their feet. They may be required to lift heavy boxes or to use stepladders to retrieve supplies from high shelves.

Aides work the same hours as pharmacists. This includes evenings, nights, weekends, and some holidays. Because some hospital and retail pharmacies are open 24 hours a day, aides may work varying shifts. There are many opportunities for part-time work in both retail and hospital settings.

### Employment

Pharmacy aides held about 57,000 jobs in 2000. Over 80 percent were in retail pharmacies, either independently owned or part of a drug store chain, grocery store, department store, or mass retailer. The vast majority of these are in drug stores. Thirteen percent were in hospitals, and the rest were in mail-order pharmacies, clinics, pharmaceutical wholesalers, and the Federal Government.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most pharmacy aides receive informal on-the-job training, but employers favor those with at least a high school diploma. Prospective pharmacy aides with experience working as a cashier may have an advantage. Employers also prefer applicants with strong customer service and communication skills and experience managing inventories and using a computer. Aides entering the field need strong spelling, reading, and mathematics skills.

Successful pharmacy aides are organized, dedicated, friendly, and responsible. They should be willing and able to take directions. Candidates interested in becoming pharmacy aides cannot have prior records of drug or substance abuse. Strong interpersonal and communication skills are needed because there is a lot of interaction with patients, coworkers, and healthcare professionals. Teamwork is very important because aides are often required to work with technicians and pharmacists.

Pharmacy aides almost always are trained on the job. They may begin by observing a more experienced worker. After they become familiar with the store's equipment, policies, and procedures, they begin to work on their own. Once they become experienced workers, they are not likely to receive additional training, except when new equipment is introduced or when policies or procedures change.

To become a pharmacy aide, one should be able to perform repetitive work accurately. Aides need good basic mathematics skills and good manual dexterity. Because they deal constantly with the public, pharmacy aides should be neat in appearance and able to deal pleasantly and tactfully with customers. Some employers may prefer people with experience typing, handling money, or operating specialized equipment, including computers.

Advancement usually is limited, although some aides may decide to become a pharmacy technician or to enroll in pharmacy school to become a pharmacist.

### Job Outlook

Job opportunities for full- and part-time work are expected to be good, especially for aides with related work experience. Job openings will be created by employment growth and by the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

Employment of pharmacy aides is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2010 due to the increased pharmaceutical needs of a larger and older population and to the greater use of medication. The increased number of middle-aged and elderly people—who, on average, use more prescription drugs than do younger people—will spur demand for aides in all practice settings.

Cost-conscious insurers, pharmacies, and health systems will continue to emphasize the role of aides. As a result, pharmacy aides will assume responsibility for more routine tasks previously performed by pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, thereby giving pharmacists more time to interact with patients and affording technicians more time to prepare medications.

### Earnings

Median hourly earnings of pharmacy aides were \$8.52 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.16 and \$10.58; the lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.12, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$13.14. Median hourly earnings of pharmacy aides were \$8.02 in drug stores and proprietary stores, \$11.17 in hospitals, and \$8.47 in grocery stores in 2000.

### Related occupations

The work of pharmacy aides is closely related to that of pharmacy technicians. Workers in other medical support occupations include dental assistants, licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses, medical transcriptionists, medical records and health information technicians, occupational therapist assistants and aides, physical therapist assistants and aides, and surgical technologists.

### Sources of Additional Information

For information on employment opportunities, contact local employers or local offices of the State employment service.

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## Physical Therapist Assistants and Aides

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### Significant Points

- Employment is projected to increase much faster than the average, as rapid growth in the number of middle-aged and elderly individuals increases the demand for therapeutic services.
- Licensed physical therapist assistants have an associate's degree, but physical therapist aides usually learn skills on the job.
- More than two-thirds of jobs for physical therapist assistants and aides were in hospitals or offices of physical therapists.

### Nature of the Work

Physical therapist assistants and aides perform components of physical therapy procedures and related tasks selected by a supervising physical therapist. These workers assist physical therapists in providing services that help improve mobility, relieve pain, and prevent or limit permanent physical disabilities of patients suffering from injuries or disease. Patients include accident victims and individuals with disabling conditions, such as low back pain, arthritis, heart disease, fractures, head injuries, and cerebral palsy.

*Physical therapist assistants* perform a variety of tasks. Components of treatment procedures performed by these workers, under the direction and supervision of physical therapists, involve exercises, massages, electrical stimulation, paraffin baths, hot and cold packs, traction, and ultrasound. Physical therapist assistants record the patient's responses to treatment and report to the physical therapist the outcome of each treatment.